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AN ORATION,

IN DEFENCE OF

DIVINE REVELATION;

TOGETHER WITH THE

VALEDICTORY ADDRESSES;

DELIVERED IN THE

BAPTIST MEETING-HOUSE, IN

PROVIDENCE,

AT THE

COMMENCEMENT OF *RHODE-ISLAND*

COLLEGE, *SEPTEMBER* 6,

A. D. 1797.

BY *BENJAMIN ALLEN*, A. B.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

An ORATION.

MANKIND have differed in nothing more than in their religious opinions. Their creeds have been as various as their countenances. Education has no ſmall ſhare in producing this wonderful variety. We are paſſive to its influence.

Religion, of ſome kind or other, has been acknowledged by all mankind, in all ages, and in all parts of the globe. It has been conſidered as the moſt noble employment of the ſoul, and productive of the moſt beneficial conſequences to civil ſociety. Theſe things have occurred, although moſt of the religions extant owe their exiſtence more to ignorance than to argument, and are more the effects of blind credulity, than reaſonable conviction. This ariſes from the nature of the ſubject. Our religion is formed before the reaſoning faculties are ſufficiently matured for examination. Principles imbibed in infancy are extremely difficult to be eradicated. They grow with our growth, they ſtrengthen with our ſtrength. Here commences the boaſted empire of conſcience, whoſe dictates it is thought the higheſt criminality to violate. There is ſomething too in the ſubject of religion ſo ſolemn and awful, that we dare ſcarcely attempt to reaſon ourſelves out of pre-eſtabliſhed errors. A dread of ſomething hereafter, the hopes of happier days, ruſh upon the anxious ſoul, and diſarm it of its reaſoning power. Men in all ages have been the ſubjects of religious fear. Immoderate

forebodings of a world *to come*, have robbed the *preſent* of half its lawful enjoyments.

Religion, deſigned to render man "mild and ſociable to man," has rendered him ſelfiſh and implacable. Abſurdities and perſecutions have been the attendants of every ſyſtem of religion under heaven. How often have the rights and dignity of human nature been inſulted, degraded and trampled upon? How often have the honour and character of Deity been traduced, by the impious and abſurd doctrines of religious eſtabliſhments? How often have mankind been deceived and led aſtray from truth, by ſyſtems bearing only the *name* of Divinity? How often has the ſacred name of Jehovah been inſulted by men acting under the ſpecious appearance of ſuperior piety? Theſe abuſes, with many others committed under the maſk of religious hypocriſy, have induced ſome to reject all revelation, as repugnant to reaſon; impoſing on the ignorance and credulity of the vulgar; degrading the exalted abilities of man, and inconſiſtent with the character of Deity. They either artfully inſinuate, or openly declare, that the religion of a Saviour ſtands on the ſame foundation with that of a Mahomet, and the fables of antiquity. They inſiſt that ignorance and impoſition are equally the ſupporters of all. They renounce all the luminous truths of revelation; they place in their ſtead the forlorn "age of reaſon." They aim their wit and ridicule at the very exiſtence of Chriſtianity, and treat with impious and ungenerous contempt that life and immortality brought to light by the goſpel. They rob virtue of her hope. They add inſult to the misfortunes of life. They transform the beauties of Paradiſe into the barren wilds of non-exiſtence. They plant on the grave the ſeeds of annihilation. They level man with the brute. Deſtined, like a meteor of the night, to blaze for a moment, he vaniſhes

forever in the ſhades of darkneſs. To-day he exults in the higheſt glory; to-morrow he mingles with the worm in the duſt.

Man, as a being prone to err, becomes an object of commiſeration. Ridicule is a breach of humanity; it is offering violence to the feelings of the human heart. We will ſhed the tear of ſorrow over the tomb of man's departed glory; but let us not deprive him of that religion which alone can alleviate the misfortunes of life.

While men have been pleading an univerſal toleration of religious opinions, we rejoiced at their ſucceſs; we ſaw them diſarming perſecution of her weapons; we imbibed their ſympathy; we warmed with their philanthropy. That elegance of ſtyle and independency of thought which characterize the writings of ſome who have oppoſed revelation, have in ſome inſtances captivated the paſſions and ſeduced the judgment. They have with great exultation vilified the character of the clergy. We are ſenſible of eccleſiaſtical abuſes; they cannot be too much expoſed: but while we deprecate the ambition of the clergy, ſo deſtructive to the peace of civil ſociety, when ſtrengthened by the arm of the magiſtrate, let us not abuſe indiſcriminately an order of men ſo important and uſeful to mankind. Society, in an improved ſtate, cannot exiſt without them. Though they form the mind and mend the heart, yet ſome, either from ignorance or envy, have repreſented them as unfriendly to the improvements of the human mind—to the lights and progreſs of philoſophy. We feel ourſelves peculiarly pleaſed and honoured in appealing to the preſent occaſion, as a full refutation of their illiberal aſperſions. Thoſe venerable Worthies, whoſe preſence gives dignity and reſpect to the ceremonies of this day; whoſe benevolence is at this moment liſtening to the feeble efforts of the ſpeaker, riſe ſuperior to the inſinuations of malice, and ſufficiently evince their attachment to ſcience and virtue.

But what have the ſyſtems and errors of men to do with the religion of heaven? We renounce all ſyſtems but the ſyſtem of God. Men, in ſupporting their favourite opinions, have undoubtedly been led into error. This by no means derogates from truth. While we ſmile at the incomprehenſible commentaries of ſyſtem-builders, our veneration for the great original is increaſed. Like its divine Author, it cannot be deſtroyed. Heaven and earth ſhall paſs away, and nature diſſolve at the feet of Jehovah—but religion exiſts forever.

As a ſyſtem coming from heaven, with every mark of its divinity, it ought to influence our belief and actions. But, ſay ſome, the belief of the Chriſtian ſcriptures is no proof of their truth and importance. Becauſe, continue the objectors, the ſame proof is applicable to every ſyſtem of error extant. This will be granted. Things are either true or falſe, independent of belief. "Man cannot create, he can only d ſcover."

But the credence of falſe ſyſtems of religions, is no proof or argument againſt one which carries indelible characters of its divinity. It rather heightens its value. Virtue never more intereſts the heart than when contraſted with vice. To reject *all* truth, merely becauſe we are liable to err, is the height of abſurdity. Man, it is true, is from his cradle expoſed to deception. This by no means argues him deſtitute of knowledge. Admit this reaſoning to be juſt, and you not only deſtroy the credibility of revealed religion, but you ſtrike at the root of all knowledge, and level man's boaſted acquirements in the duſt.

The weakneſs of human reaſon to determine on many things in morals and religion, points out to man the neceſſity of ſome ſuperior guide, of ſome unerring ſtandard, to which he may refer his actions, and appreciate their worth. The very idea of man's moral agency involves in it the ſuppo-

ſition of laws to aſcertain and govern his actions. From whom can thoſe laws originate, but the Legiſlator of the Univerſe? If God govern the natural world by univerſal laws, why not the moral? The ſame neceſſity is evident in both. The promulgation of theſe laws is the revelation we plead for. The neceſſity and importance of ſuch a revelation becomes a ſerious and all-intereſting enquiry. It involves in it man's preſent and future happineſs.

The great end Deity had in view, in delivering to man a tranſcript of his mind, was to make known to him his true character; to teach him in what his real happineſs conſiſts; to confirm the wiſhes of his heart in immortality; to offer the greateſt incentives to virtue, the greateſt determents from vice, by eſtabliſhing the doctrine of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments. The incomprehenſibility of ſome parts of revelation has, with great force and dependence, been urged as an inſuperable objection to their veracity. It remains for thoſe who make the objection to prove this peculiar to revelation.

As well might we reject the truth of our own exiſtence, becauſe we cannot comprehend the laws of animal motion. Shall we diſbelieve the exiſtence of all thoſe magnificent ſcenes diſcloſed to our view throughout the works of creation, becauſe we cannot comprehend *all* the laws by which they are governed? Man, after all his wonderful diſcoveries, will find more to admire than to comprehend—more to animate his devotion than to confirm his unbelief.

This, ſo far from being an argument againſt the truth of revelation, is one of the greateſt in its favour. If man had been its author, would it not in every reſpect have been within the ſphere of his comprehenſion? Like all the works of man, whether of genius or imitation, it might have been perfectly underſtood.

In a revelation coming from heaven, we cannot expect, in the preſent ſtate of exiſtence, fully to comprehend all its deſigns. The weakneſs of human reaſon is ſuch, as to render us totally unqualified to ſcan the counſels of the Divinity.

That there are many things beyond the comprehenſion of the human mind, is the experience of philoſophy. The Chriſtian ſcriptures are not a ſingular caſe. Omniſcience is an attribute of Deity only. It is ſufficient for man he can learn his duty, and motives powerful enough to prompt him to its performance. Revelation contains both in an eminent degree. All knowledge flows from God. The mind that can fully comprehend the anatomy of a fly, is equal to the knowledge of the univerſe. The power that can give animation to a mite, can with the ſame eaſe move unnumbered worlds.

Aſtoniſhed at the wonderful diſcoveries made in the philoſophic world, ſome have ſuppoſed revelation to be ſuperfluous. Philoſophy, it is true, diſcloſes to us ten thouſand ſcenes, all beautiful; all magnificent; all ſublime. Aſſiſted by ſcience, man has read the great volume of creation; he has triumphed over the elements; he has rendered the laws of nature obedient to his will. But however extenſive man's reſearches may be; however he may have improved his mind or exalted his nature by the lights of reaſon and philoſophy; yet, aſſiſted by theſe alone, all his proſpects, all his expectations, terminate in uncertainty. Clouds and darkneſs hover over the regions of the grave. We mark man's entrance into life; we obſerve the developement of his genius, in all his wonderful diſcoveries; we follow him to the tomb—but, deſtitute of the light of revelation, we loſe him forever.

The diſpoſition of Deity towards man, in pardoning his ſins, and reſtoring him to future happineſs, can never be diſcovered by the efforts of

reaſon, however improved by philoſophy, or matured by experience. The hiſtory of ages proves to us the uncertainty in which the light of nature and the ſagacity of philoſophy leave man, with reſpect to a future exiſtence.

The human mind, long before the dawn of the Chriſtian æra, had arrived at an aſtoniſhing degree of refinement. Poets had reached the height of ſublimity, orators had harangued in all the vehemence of eloquence, philoſophers had taught the principles of morality; but the great problem of man's immortality remained unſolved. It was reſerved for revelation to demonſtrate the truth of man's reſurrection. Her energiſing voice awakes the ſlumbers of the tombs. She gives to man a new creation. She proclaims him the heir of immortal glory. Situated in the midſt of gazing worlds, he intereſts the feelings of all that bright train which bow before the burning throne of God.

The proſpects of man are great—his happineſs inviolate. Deity has diſtinguiſhed him as an object of his peculiar beneficence and attention. He has ſtamped on him the ſeal of his divinity. His progreſs in ſcience and religion proves the infinite perfectibility of his mind. Erect in ſtature, man ſeems formed for contemplating all the beautiful and ſublime works of nature. Although an inhabitant of earth, his wiſhes reach beyond the ſtars. The glittering portals of heaven lie wide extended for man's reception. The ſhades of ignorance and tyrannic gloom, which have ſo long beclouded the proſpects of man, are vaniſhing before him. Wafted on the wing of inſpiration, we hail the period as not far diſtant, when the religion of peace and good-will ſhall emancipate man, and give to the univerſe the higheſt poſſible happineſs,

VALEDICTORY ADDRESSES.

1. *To the* CORPORATION.

IN retiring from the place of our education, gratitude demands our acknowledgments to the honourable Corporation.

If to form the mind to virtue and knowledge, is an object of the firſt magnitude in a free ſtate, what reſpect is due to the founders and patrons of this flouriſhing inſtitution! Your benevolent exertions in the cauſe of ſcience and religion, merit the eulogium of every friend of humanity, but more eſpecially of us, who this day receive the honours of this Univerſity. To you, Gentlemen, are due the firſt fruits of all our toils. It is to you, ye friends of ſcience and freedom, we owe the birth of that inſtitution which calls us her ſons. This renders your names and your virtues dear to our memories. Senſible of the importance and neceſſity of a general diffuſion of knowledge in a republican government; actuated by the noble principles of patriotiſm and philanthropy, you have founded and foſtered to its preſent reſpectability yon aſylum of the arts and ſciences. Your exertions have not been in vain. Under your patronage, and the bleſſings of an approving heaven, each returning anni-

verſary has rewarded your toils, and animated your zeal.

Go on, generous Sirs, in your laudable undertakings; perfect the important deſigns of your inſtitution, and immortalize your names.

II. *To the* CHANCELLOR.

WITH ſentiments of the higheſt eſteem we turn to the honourable Chancellor of the College. We come to offer him the ſpontaneous effuſions of our hearts. Deign, worthy Sir, to accept this ſmall tribute of gratitude.

Superior merit and diſtinguiſhed virtues command our reſpect and veneration. To whom are they more juſtly due, than to him who is honoured with the moſt dignified rank among the worthy patrons of this ſeat of literature?

He who patronizes the arts and ſciences, becomes the benefactor of mankind. We know your zeal and exertions in the cauſe of education and freedom. The intereſt and welfare of this inſtitution lie near your heart. May its future proſperity be equal to your benevolent wiſhes. May it ever be bleſſed by the guardianſhip of ſuch illuſtrious worthies. We hope the patronage of a character ſo influential, will become an example of imitation to the worthy citizens of Rhode-Iſland.—Then ſhall our Alma Mater rejoice in the number of her *native* ſons, and receive the patronage of the Legiſlature. Your reward ſhall then be the gratitude of an enlightened people, and the approbation of the Judge of the Univerſe.

III. *To the* PRESIDENT.

REV. SIR,

PARTIAL as we are to the place of our education; warm as our boſoms glow with love and gratitude to you, for your attention and ſolici-

tude in advancing our literary acquirements and future proſperity; we do not wiſh to intrude on your feelings, by a public recital of your many virtues, of which few of your acquaintance, none of this ſociety, can be ignorant. But we cannot conceal our attachment and veneration for the man who has been our affectionate friend and literary guide. It is to you we are indebted for thoſe leſſons of wiſdom and morality, which add dignity to our natures, and ſenſibility to our feelings. You have unbarred to us the gates of glory.—You have preſented to our minds religion in all her God-like excellencies. Never ſhall the cold hand of *unbelief* chill thoſe boſoms which have been warmed with your perſuaſive devotion.

Your paternal tenderneſs, ſo ſoothing to our boſoms, ſhall never be forgotten. Accept, dear Sir, our unfeigned thanks for your many kind offices. To deſerve your future friendſhip and patronage is the firſt wiſh of our hearts. While the finger of ſcience directs the ſons of Columbia to yon ſeat of the Muſes, may no demon of diſcord enter thoſe peaceful walls where our beſt friend preſides. Long, Sir, may you continue the father of this riſing inſtitution—a guide to our youth—an ornament of religion, and the admiration of an enlightened age.

IV. *To the* PROFESSORS *and* TUTORS.

TO the worthy Profeſſors and Tutors is juſtly due the tribute of gratitude. In looking back on the paſt ſcenes of collegiate life, we behold you, Gentlemen, alluring us through the delightful walks of ſcience and refinement. You have animated us in the purſuit of virtue and knowledge by your own amiable examples and extenſive acquirements. If we have not improved, it cannot be imputed to your want of atten-

tion. You have on all occaſions convinced us of the neceſſity and importance of acquiring and maintaining characters fair and unſullied. May our future conduct in life never d ſappoint the benevolent wiſhes of your hearts. We can never ſufficiently admire thoſe talents and virtues, which have been ſo zealouſly devoted to our beſt intereſt. That reſpect and eſteem you have taught us to entertain for the great and the good, we feel in a pre-eminent degree for you. This, Gentlemen, is not the language of adulation, but the ſentiments of thoſe, who wiſh to expreſs the feelings of their hearts. Time will not permit us to treſpaſs on your patience, by relating the many favours you have conferred on us. Farewell, ye guardians of our education; may the beſt of heaven's bleſſings reward your virtues.

V. *To the* STUDENTS.

THE intereſt we feel in your welfare, who are to follow us in thoſe peaceful walks of literature, will not permit us to part from you in ſilence. You, fellow Students, ſtill inhabit yon edifice dedicated to the genius of man. You are ſtill the votaries of ſcience. Never will you behold more tranquil moments; enjoy them rationally, and you muſt be happy.

Your time at this period of life is doubly valuable. Its wiſe improvement will add a ſplendour to your riſing ſun. Let this conſideration animate you to purſue with unremitting attention your literary ſtudies. Let each day behold you advancing in virtue and knowledge. In youth ten thouſand faſcinating charms captivate the paſſions, and divert the mind from the nobler purſuits of ſcience. Theſe can be overcome by reſolution and perſeverance only. Render each moment ſubſervient to the great objects now in view. You are placed here by the affection of

parents, whoſe wiſhes and expectations are deeply intereſted in your preſent and future reſpectability. Let them not be diſappointed.

Encourage a noble ambition, which ſcorns the low arts of envy, or the ſecret inſinuations of detraction. Let not a competition of intereſt weaken or diminiſh your friendſhip. The great man's glory is in the rewards of virtue and excellency. Let your hearts be ever open and ready to receive the advice of your inſtructors. The counſels of the aged are experience in anticipation.

In parting with you, our feelings are ſupported by the pleaſing reflection, that the field of ſcience you are now exploring is happily calculated to alleviate a further ſeparation from the arms and ſociety of your friends. We now, young Gentlemen, bid you adieu, wiſhing you may do honour to the place of your education, and receive the approbation of a grateful country.

VI. *To the* GRADUATES.

WITH a heart filled with the tendereſt emotions, I now addreſs a ſociety with whom I have participated in the moſt friendly intercourſe; in whoſe arms and attachment I have paſſed the happieſt moments of my life; with whom I have formed a connexion in purſuits the moſt honorary to our natures, and uſeful to mankind. We have enjoyed in common the pleaſures and advantages of ſcience and philoſophy. But theſe ſcenes, ſo pleaſing to the youthful mind, are ſoon to be cloſed. The time ſet apart and devoted to our education is meaſured and completed. A new day advances with haſte, to light us to the boſom of our country. The delightful retreats of philoſophic repoſe are to be exchanged for the rights and duties of civil ſociety. This to us becomes an all-important period; while it terminates our reſidence in the

ſchool of claſſic erudition, it gives us admiſſion on the wide theatre of the world. We become citizens of an enlightened nation. Let us carry with us into its boſom thoſe leſſons of patriotiſm and freedom we have been taught in the ſhades of the academic grove. Let our future lives, as citizens and as men, be worthy the place of our education. May thoſe who have with parental care guided the ſteps of our youth, rejoice in our future uſefulneſs to mankind. We cannot deny them this ſmall recompence. May our lives be ever governed by the great lights of reaſon and revelation. Then ſhall we meet theſe our friends beyond the narrow tide of time, where ſighing and ſorrow ſhall be no more, and tears ſhall be wiped from all faces. Animated by this heart-cheering proſpect, let us purſue the career of unlimited improvement. The God of boundleſs love will never ſuffer the wonderful acquirements of man to ſleep in the cold bed of death. Each improvement we make in virtue, each acquiſition we gain in ſcience, will be treading the courts of immortality.

Although ſeparated as we ſoon ſhall be by returning to our homes—yet by indulging a retroſpective view of the ſciences we have ſtudied together, of the pleaſures we have enjoyed in each other's ſociety, and the friendſhips we have here contracted, ſhall we not daily meet in yon retreat of the Muſes, and ſteal ourſelves from the cares of a buſy world? Yes, my Claſs-Mates, the recollection of your friendſhip and tenderneſs ſhall often, through the varied ſcenes of future life, excite the tear of ſympathy and love. Your friendly images are too deeply engraved on the tablets of my heart for time ever to eraſe. Receive, dear Brothers, my beſt wiſhes for your future happineſs. May the gentle breath of peace forever attend you. But why ſhould we, in the

midſt of this liſtening and ſympathiſing audience, recount our attachments, or renew the ſincerity of our friendſhip? They are not inſenſible of our feelings. They can witneſs to the reluctance of our parting.

But time haſtens us to perform the moſt pleaſing and affecting ſcene of this day's anniverſary.

To you, ye Companions of my youthful days, I now appeal for a deſcription of ſenſations with which my heart is agitated.

I muſt bid you a long, perhaps to ſome of you —an eternal adieu! Let not our ſeparation weaken or break the cords of friendſhip and love.

I have now arrived at the moſt trying ſcene my duty has ever called me to perform. The curtain of ſeparation is faſt drawing. One more moment diſſolves forever our collegiate connexion. With the ſincerity of a friend, the love of a brother, and the benediction of heaven, I wiſh you all an affectionate FAREWELL!

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